



Trust for
Oxfordshire's
Environment



**OXFORDSHIRE
COUNTY COUNCIL**

ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY

www.oxfordshire.gov.uk

Countryside Service

Places for People

Information pack for projects that improve access
to Oxfordshire's countryside

Contains:

- Introduction to the scheme
- Examples of potential projects
- The application process
- Pre-application checklist



Revised April 2008

Introduction

The Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment (TOE) and Oxfordshire County Council's Countryside Service (OCC), in association with Grundon Waste Management, Viridor Credits and Waste Recycling Group are offering local communities and groups the chance to apply for grants from £2,000 up to £10,000 to **improve countryside access** in their areas. These improvements should help to provide health, social and economic benefits for residents and visitors to the area.

TOE is a non-profit making company set up in 1998 to make funding available under the Landfill Communities Fund. TOE receives landfill tax credits from local landfill operators and makes these funds available to a wide variety of community and environmental projects across Oxfordshire.

Who can apply?

Town and Parish Councils or Meetings, District and County Councils, voluntary or charitable organisations, user groups with a constitution and other relevant organisations. This scheme is not open to private individuals or enterprises.

What can the grant be used for?

Most projects that deliver practical access benefits—in line with the key assessment criteria on the penultimate page of this guidance.

What can't the grant be used for?

- Projects that are an organisation's statutory or maintenance responsibility—e.g. repair or replacement of stiles, bridges, banks, towpaths etc
- Projects that do not have the landowners express permission about the works and the works process
- Projects that do not make access easier—e.g. replacing stiles with stiles is not supported, but replacing stiles with kissing gates or gates is

Do I need to find the additional 10% third party funding contribution?

- No, as part of this scheme, the Countryside Service is guaranteeing to provide the additional 10% third party funding amount for awards up to £10,000, so you need to just apply for 100% of the costs.
- However, we encourage organisations to secure matched funding and/or work in kind from volunteers so that the funds can achieve more on the ground

The next section should help you with your project planning and application. It gives examples of some of the type of projects that could be funded. Projects are not limited to these examples, and the list of issues is not exhaustive so you are encouraged to speak to TOE about your proposal at an early stage.

TOE Administrator: **01865 883488** (Wed and Thurs only)
Email: **toe@ruralnet.org.uk**

Potential Projects

The following are examples of projects that could be funded through this scheme. The examples are not exhaustive though and we would be happy to discuss your proposal with you at an early stage in order to ascertain its suitability.

1. Access improvement works – furniture improvements on a network of local routes

A popular choice for communities is applying for funding to improve access on their local public rights of way by, for example, replacing a number of stiles with pedestrian gates or kissing gates to create a stile free circular walk or link route.

This is a great way to improve access for more people and also make the access furniture easier to maintain in the future. Many landowners prefer kissing gates as they can prevent livestock escaping from a field. However, kissing gates can be difficult to negotiate particularly for people with disabilities or for people with small children and push chairs – and we must ensure that we try and install furniture that is as accessible as possible. **Stiles will not be grant aided.** Nowadays, most wooden or steel gate kits are supplied with a reliable self-closing mechanism which keeps stock secure. This should be pointed out to land managers during your discussions and your local rights of way field officer can assist if needed.



Epwell village volunteers & Cotswolds Voluntary Wardens replacing a stile with a pedestrian gate

.....furniture improvements continued

As a general rule, pedestrian gates should be at least 1m (3ft) wide and bridle gates should be at least 1.5m (5ft) in width. This will allow the passage of horses and cyclists (not on footpaths), plus pedestrians and mobility vehicles for people with disabilities. You will also need to ensure that any new access furniture is installed on the legal line of the public right of way. You can check this by looking at the latest version of the Definitive Map and Statement. Your local council will have a copy of this or you can look in your district council offices or the Oxford Library.

Centrewire and Blackburn Fraser are two of the leading specialist suppliers of easy to use gates for rights of way which conform to the relevant British Standard and offer options for the best type of accessibility. Further details can be obtained from www.gatesandstiles.com and www.blackburnfraser.co.uk. Alternatively there are other local suppliers of gates and stiles in Oxfordshire listed in the Yellow Pages and if you decide to use a contractor, they should be able to source gates for you—but please ensure that they are of a suitable standard and self closing.



The scheme is not just for walkers! Improvements to bridleways around Otmoor:



2. Community access notice boards and information signing.

One of the simplest ways in which local communities can encourage more people to responsibly access and enjoy their local countryside is to produce information boards and provide better information on the ground.

A good way to do this is to think about where many local people or visitors congregate or pass by (e.g. village shop or pub), and speak to the owner about the potential for installing a notice board. Notice boards can come in all shapes and forms, but consider the local environment and setting when planning the material



Access information signs at Cumnor and Aston Rowant:



Walking and riding maps are a really good way of showing what is available in an area. You can show all of the routes in the area as well as the natural attractions that are around, as well as including local businesses that visitors and residents may find useful, such as shops, pubs, cycle and horse storage, accommodation etc. This is good for the walkers and riders, and good for business too!

If you are planning to base your information (even just using traced maps) on Ordnance Survey (OS) maps then this may be covered by the County Council's licence agreement with OS, or by that of the Parish and Town Council or other groups. There are certain copyright rules and further information is available from the Countryside Service.

Note: TOE cannot fund information projects by themselves—but can combine them as part of a bigger access improvement project that puts in improvements on the ground.

3. Accessibility Improvements – Surfacing

Many routes are used for journeys to school and work, or are used all year round for getting to popular visitor attractions and places of interest. Often, people using these routes are not equipped with specialist walking attire, or there may be a need to make the routes more accessible to people with mobility difficulties, including needing to use pushchairs, wheelchairs and other walking aids.

In certain circumstances it may be appropriate to improve the path by widening it, or surfacing it with stone, asphalt or geotextile for this better access.

Surfacing improvement of paths is something that needs careful thought combined with the appropriate technical expertise so that a proper assessment of the proposal is undertaken. This includes the relative impacts on the look and setting of the local environment, future maintenance issues, and possible impacts on existing and potential users.

It is essential to work with the landowner and highway authority before works are commissioned.



“Routes available for all” - access path improvements at Aston Rowant National Nature Reserve:



5. Other schemes likely to be approved

- Creation of new routes for walkers, cyclists and/or equestrians that connect communities to each other or enable easier or safer access to the wider countryside. These would preferably be new definitive rights of way which do not involve diversions of existing routes, and would need the full support of land managers and local communities before making the application.
- Access improvements combined with habitat improvement works

Application process

Application submission

- The project (or the TOE-funded part of the project) must not be started until the grant has been awarded
- Applications are made to TOE using their standard application forms. Please include all of the required information and completed checklist so that there are no processing delays.
- OCC Countryside Service cannot provide a guaranteed level of advice or offer to undertake the practical works for projects on public rights of way. However every effort will be made to try and provide some level of advice and technical support. Applicants are recommended to include the costs of consultants or contractors in their applications, if necessary for the project.
- On the application for para 4.3, note that OCC Countryside Service is guaranteeing to supply this contribution for qualifying projects. Enter “yes” here and then “OCC Countryside Service”
- Make sure you are claiming the percentage of the project’s total cost—100% if there are no other funders, or the percentage if you have secured match funding from elsewhere. Applications will be eligible and encouraged to combine Places for People funding with other sources of funding (such as National Lottery, private and community donations of cash, AONB Sustainable Development Funds etc.), subject to those organisations’ rules. If in doubt please contact TOE.
- For section 4.4 please include the cost including VAT if your organisation is not VAT registered, and the cost without VAT if you are VAT registered.

Project assessment

- OCC Countryside Service will assess all applications according to the access elements of the assessment criteria and provide a recommendation for the next quarterly TOE Board.
- The normal maximum grant would be from £1,000 up to £5,000 per project but this could be increased to £10,000+ at the Board’s discretion for exceptional projects.
- TOE aim to process applications as fast as possible after assessment. It can take as little as three weeks from Board approval to you receiving the go ahead. The time it takes is dependent on all the information and approvals being supplied by you.

Project delivery

- TOE will issue you with an Entrust registration number and grant offer letter as soon as possible. This will enable you to order the materials and equipment and notify landowners to agree the work date taking account of materials lead time.
- Please take photos of projects being worked on as well as on completion and in use. Notify TOE when the project has been completed
- OCC Countryside Service will inspect the works and advise TOE that works have been completed satisfactorily and that funds can be released.
- OCC and TOE will work with you to produce a local press release. Please supply TOE with copies of any publicity material and articles that you produce.

Key Assessment Criteria

1) Satisfies the location, eligibility and management criteria of TOE and meets one or more aims of the Oxfordshire Rights of Way Improvement Plan:

- *A better joined-up network that meets the needs and demands of users whilst accommodating the interests of land managers, the natural environment and our cultural heritage*
- *A public rights of way network which enables access for all*
- *A thriving countryside where residents and visitors are able to understand and enjoy their rights, in a responsible way*

(see the RoWIP at www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/rowip)

- 2) Is providing predominantly 'on the ground' improvements on publicly accessible land. To normally include public rights of way, country parks, nature reserves, towpaths, access land, formal permissive paths and areas.
- 3) Has the support of the community at large and encourages high levels of community involvement in its development and use, particularly if this means working with youth focused groups and youth volunteers
- 4) Incorporates matters of environmental and social responsibility, including using local suppliers and materials, using recycled and low-carbon products, ensuring durability and keeping with local environment
- 5) Provides free access to as many people as possible, with the lowest level of necessary restrictions
- 6) Does not form part of an organisation's existing statutory duty or responsibility (e.g. routine repair/maintenance work)
- 7) Can provide evidence of agreement of land managers and occupiers, and the highway authority, if works are proposed on public rights of way or roads
- 8) Applicants have investigated or secured match or part funding from other sources and/or secured work in kind by volunteers
- 9) The project can realistically be completed and invoiced within 12 months of being awarded funding
- 10) The works will not involve complex legal work or commit OCC Countryside Service, the landowner, or applicant to unreasonable future maintenance liabilities.

Pre-application checklist—include this with your application

Tick
box

- The project meets one or more aims of the Oxfordshire Rights of Way Improvement Plan and the application assessment criteria
- It is achievable within 12 months of any award of grant
- I have provided evidence of each landowner's written permission for the project, including agreed access routes, timings, disposal of old furniture and ongoing maintenance
- I have considered Health and Safety issues about doing the works. These include safe working practices and protective equipment, keeping the route open, holding Public Liability insurance, location of underground services, keeping livestock secure, disposing of old furniture
- I know who can do the works (volunteers, contractors etc) and I have obtained at least three quotes where relevant
- I have spoken to the area rights of way field officer about projects on public rights of way and secured his/her approval
- For path infrastructure items I have sought the least restrictive option so that the path is as accessible as possible (TOE will not fund stiles)
- I have included all the costs in the application—including materials, delivery to site, equipment and plant, contractors, VAT, sundries such as wood, staples, fencing etc.
- I have spoken to the materials manufacturer to find out what lead time there is for gates
- I can provide evidence that I have made provision to protect habitats and the natural environment, whilst the project is being carried out
- For items that use maps, I have obtained Ordnance Survey permission to use their data, and checked any public rights of way information with the Countryside Service
- I have taken 'before' pictures and a marked up map so that I can provide 'during' and 'after' pictures to TOE on completion